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Viewpoint

Congress should not fund the CIA's illegal activities

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The spotlight of public attention is again focused on the CIA as Congress deals with the Reagan Administration's appropriations request to continue the once covert, but now overt, support of the Contras, the rebels based in Honduras and Costa Rica who seek to embarrass, damage, and overthrow the revolutionary government of Nicaragua. Debate has been heightened by revelations of CIA mining of Nicaraguan harbors.

Isn't it time to seriously question the wisdom of the long-standing U.S. commitment to covert action against foreign governments or citizens whose policies are deemed inimical to U.S. interests? As a staunch defender of self-determination and national rights, the United States has no right to interfere in the affairs of other nations even if we disagree with their policies and their alliances.

I AM not referring to intelligence gathering, the spy function of CIA, part of which is done under cover. I mean the planning, support, and implementation of covert actions

intended to overthrow a foreign government, interfere with a foreign government's elective processes, or compromise or assassinate a foreign leader.

In the first place, no legal right exists for the United States to act or support actions to overthrow a government with whom we are not at war, destroy their infrastructure and facilities, or murder their officials or citizens, even those who are outspoken critics of our nation, our allies, and our friends.

SECOND, COVERT actions have not proven effective. The 1961 ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, planned by the Eisenhower and implemented by the Kennedy administration, was counterproductive. United States relations with Cuba were damaged beyond repair. Castro's stature in the Caribbean and Latin America was enhanced, and increased support to Cuba from the Soviet Union was encouraged.

Third, the very nature of CIA covert operations is a subtle, continuing threat to the well-being of the United States. Such secrecy on the part of the CIA, the Congress, and ad-

ministration is hardly compatible with the basic concepts of our constitution and the traditional openness of our government. Too few individuals have too much authority and too little accountability. What certainty is there that unscrupulous persons cloaked in secrecy may not, in a time of crisis, turn inward and use covert actions to thwart the will of the majority? May not the implied blessing of the CIA's covert actions encourage the FBI and others to follow suit?

FINALLY, THERE is a question of credibility. Immoral and illegal covert operations harm the image of the United States as a leader in the world community's quest for international peace and security. We need not resort to activities which are illegal, immoral, hazardous, and of questionable effectiveness.

We should not stoop to undercover violence and terrorism for which we harshly criticize other nations. Surely there are better ways to use our power and resources to cope with the problems facing a troubled, interdependent world and thereby enhance our own security.